

FAIR DISTRICTS GA

PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY TOOLKIT



JUNE 2021

Fair Districts GA is a nonpartisan organization that works to end electoral map rigging in Georgia. Our *sole* focus is to fight gerrymandering, the practice of drawing legislative district lines to favor one group over another. Our ultimate goal is to reform Georgia's process for drawing state and federal electoral maps.

Fair Districts GA supports stronger standards and a nonpartisan, transparent, accountable redistricting process.

Fair Districts GA supports the Democracy Act (HR 55 & SR 20 in the 2021/22 session) which will provide transparency, standards and an independent citizen redistricting commission. We also support The Transparency Act (HB 189 & SB 186 in the 2021/22 session) as an intermediate step to increase transparency in the redistricting process. In addition, we support the end to mid-cycle pinpoint redistricting in which legislators can redistrict anytime between the ten-year census requirement.

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Fair Districts GA advocates for three simple principles for the 2021 Georgia redistricting process:

Listen:

Draw maps that reflect community input. Redistricting has a very real impact on the voices of citizens in every county, city, and town. Legislators must listen carefully to communities across the state about their desired representation, and they must account for that input when drawing maps. Communities, in turn, must clearly express their rationale for cohesive representation.

Show Your Work:

Make the process public and transparent. Lift the veil of secrecy surrounding the work of legislators and their staff. Georgia's procedures are particularly opaque, but the legislature can change them at will. The work of redistricting can and should be done in full view of the public. Legislators should adopt rules that require full and timely disclosure of all work. Data, algorithms, and maps should be released in time for public review and comment, well in advance of legislative votes.

Check Your Work:

Establish nonpartisan, objective benchmarks for the mapping of voting districts. Here's some good news: the same advanced software and data used by legislators to develop districts is for the first time, widely available in the public domain. Fair Districts GA is partnering with the Princeton Gerrymandering Project to provide statistical benchmarks for partisan balance and minority representation. This data can be used to guide map development and measure finished maps. Georgia's legislators should commit to meeting these benchmarks.

Many groups across Georgia will be deploying another Princeton innovation, Representable.org, which enables citizens to define communities of interest and legislators to incorporate them into maps.

This toolkit is designed to support citizen input into the redistricting public hearing process in Georgia.

Public Hearings

The legislative committees of the Georgia General Assembly have announced a series of public hearings to gain input from citizens on the upcoming redistricting process. These hearings will include two virtual sessions and in-person options at nine locations across the state.

2021 Summer Town Hall Public Hearings on Redistricting

Atlanta

When: Monday, June 28, 2021, from 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Where: Georgia State Capitol – Room 341
206 Washington Street
Atlanta, GA 30334

Cumming

When: Tuesday, June 29, 2021, from 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Where: South Forsyth High School – Cafeteria
585 Peachtree Parkway
Cumming, GA 30041

Dalton

When: Wednesday, June 30, 2021, from 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Where: Dalton State College – Goodroe Auditorium
656 College Drive
Dalton, GA 30720

Additional dates/cities, exact locations TBD. All meetings from 5-7 p.m.

July 6 - Athens

July 27 - Albany

July 30 - Virtual

July 7 - Augusta

July 28 - Columbus

July 26 - Brunswick

July 29 - Macon

This is a great opportunity to provide input to the legislature *BEFORE* they draw and propose maps based on the final census release this fall. The more legislators hear from citizens, the more they will listen to our concerns and we can hold them accountable. Even if you have never “testified” before, this toolkit will provide you the information you need to prepare and deliver strong public testimony.

We anticipate these hearings to be run like any other legislative hearing. Legislators will be present to hear testimony from concerned groups and individuals. Testimony is typically time limited to 2-5 minutes with extra time allotted if the legislators have questions, a staff member will likely keep time and stop the speaker at the limit.

We *STRONGLY* recommend that you prepare written testimony. This will support you having your thoughts together when testifying, help to keep within the time limit and provide written input for the committee's reference later.

As you write your testimony, include these components of successful testimony:

- Establish who you are and your credentials
- Identify the critical point
- Tell a story
- Provide evidence and list consequences
- Specify an "ask"

"Hello committee, my name is Janet Grant. I've been a resident of the Greenwood Circle neighborhood in the city of Decatur for 2 years. I'm here with a group of my neighbors and the neighborhood coalition. I would like to urge the committee to keep my community together. As you can see on the current house district legislative map, our community is currently divided into 4 house districts and represented by four different representatives. This makes it difficult for our community to have a clear legislative representative focused on our issues. Respectfully, I ask that you unite Decatur in one house district."

Community of Interest: "Three Cs"

The focus of this public testimony is to receive information about the unique characteristics of the public's Communities of Interest from those most familiar with their neighborhoods. Share the three Cs about your community.

Culture

How would you describe the people who are part of your community? What do we have in common? What is our history? What are our languages? What do we celebrate? What do we value?

Concerns

What issues need attention from government? What community projects need resources? Are there examples of elected officials ignoring our concerns?

Count

Is there data we can present that strengthens our stories? (Number of people in our community, % POC, income levels, distance from hospitals, lack of greenspace)

Be Prepared

Practice your testimony and adjust to fit within the time limit. After your testimony, you may be questioned by a legislator with a counter view, so be prepared to defend your position. That said, know that legislators are usually very respectful of citizens that take the time to testify. If you do not know an answer, just say so and tell them you can get back to them.

Testimony Tips

- Understand the process and rules-including virtual options
- Public testimony should include quantitative and qualitative evidence
- Make your testimony personal and community-centered
- Share what negative outcomes could happen if maps change or remain the same
- Aim for large community turnout to support testimony, bring friends and neighbors
- Be concise and courteous!

Sample Redistricting Testimony

Thanks to Fair Count for these video samples.

- What NOT to do
- What to do

References

- Fair Districts GA [website](#)
- Fair Districts [letter to the legislative redistricting committees](#) with recommendations for the committee redistricting guidelines, cosigned by 20 organizations
- Not sure what your district is? Find it [here first](#), then find your own [district map](#)
- Fair Maps Texas sample [public hearing testimony](#)

Written Comments

Not up to testifying? Submit comments to the legislative redistricting committees [here](#).

Georgia Senate Reapportionment and Redistricting Committee

<i>Name</i>	<i>Phone</i>	<i>Email</i>		<i>District</i>	<i>City</i>
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Georgia House Committee on Legislative and Congressional Reapportionment

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FAIR DISTRICTS GA

APPENDIX & SAMPLE ADVOCACY MESSAGES



Basic Talking Points

- Fair Districts GA is a statewide, grassroots organization *solely* dedicated to the elimination of gerrymandering in Georgia.
- Gerrymandering has been used by both parties to gain an unfair advantage in state elections.
 - There are numerous examples of gerrymandering in GA being used to exclude an incumbent from their current district and other tactics to specifically disadvantage legislators/candidates
 - In 2018, 58% of Georgia candidates for the U.S. Congress, state Senate, and state House of Representatives had no opponent and 80% of those races were won by margins of 60% to 100%. Both Republicans and Democrats are in safe seats.
- The Democracy Act (SR 20 and HR 55) reforms the procedure for drawing electoral maps to include citizen input, standards for districts, and a transparent process.
 - “The pendulum always swings” and the other party, whether Democrat or Republican, will eventually be in power. Passing The Democracy Act ensures that Democrats, Republicans, and Independents are all represented when electoral maps are drawn.
- We are asking you to support the Democracy Act (SR 20 or HR 15) and to sign on as a co-sponsor. (If the legislator is already a co-sponsor, thank them for their support.)

Republican Talking Points

- Citizen referendum votes in other red states have overwhelmingly supported redistricting reform (ie MI, OH, UT)
- Implement the Democracy Act and place an independent citizen commission in place prior to *when* (not if) the pendulum swings for D control of the process
- Democracy Act aligns with principles of *good government* with control by citizens not politicians/bureaucrats
- Reduce/eliminate the cost of legal/court challenges
- US Chamber rating includes 10% for bipartisanship
- Better policy results with centrist vs extremes

Democratic Talking Points

- Aligns with Fair Districts pledge by the National Democratic Redistricting Committee led by Eric Holder and President Obama
- Aligns with HR 1/S 1
- Aligns with Fair Fight efforts to end voter suppression
- One vote for one person
- Commitment is needed now to address redistricting reforms when move to the majority (VA example)
- Leverage results of 2020 primary D question #4 on redistricting reform, overwhelmingly support of voters for an independent commission

Myths & Facts

- *Republicans just fixed past Democratic gerrymandering in 2011: the courts “fixed” the Democratic gerrymandering in 2003, Republicans redrew these mid-cycle in 2005 with maps that were skewed to the Republicans and again in 2011*
- *Citizens elect legislature to redistrict, they are accountable to the voters: majority of citizens support an independent commission everywhere it has been on the ballot; the commission will do all work in public and be accountable to the citizens*
- *Courts blessed current GA districts: courts have not reviewed GA maps since 2003*
- *GA already uses the standards proposed: the only standard in the constitution is for districts to have contiguous territory, and these “guidelines” loosely enforced*
- *Changing redistricting opens liability to be sued: liability is higher with partisan process*
- *Voting Rights Act prohibits redistricting in majority-minority districts: minority opportunity is the key, not “packing” of minorities in these districts*